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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report brings the Economic and Social Council up to date on actions undertaken by the regional commissions during the period under review with respect to the guidance given in annex III of Council resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998. Among the main issues it brings to the attention of the Council is a regional perspective on the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, which is in response to Council decision 2005/206 of 4 February 2005. The report also provides a review of the regional dimension of global issues and the global dimension of regional issues as contained in the report of the Executive Secretaries in section II, which is submitted to the Council in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1823 (XVII) and Council resolution 1817 (LV). Efforts for effective linkages among the regional commissions and other partners at the global, interregional and regional levels are explored in section IV of the report.

The resolutions and decisions adopted by the regional commissions during the period under review that require action by the Council or are brought to its attention are contained in the addendum to the present report (E/2005/15/Add.1).

The summaries of the economic surveys of the five regions are provided to the Council for its consideration (see E/2005/16-20). The annual reports of the regional commissions are made available as background information as they address matters relevant to the issues covered in the present report and its addendum. They are issued as supplements to the *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council*.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the adoption of Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, the Secretary-General, through his reports on regional cooperation, has attempted to engage the Council in a dialogue with the Executive Secretaries on the progress achieved towards linking the activities and contributions of the commissions more effectively with the overall activities of the Organization in the economic and social sectors, as well as to the policy work of the Council. Among the issues he has raised is the lead role of the commissions as focal points in their respective regions for monitoring and assessing progress towards the achievement of the goals and targets of global conferences, as well as of the Millennium Development Goals, bearing in mind regional conditions and priorities (see E/2004/15 and E/2004/71). In the light of the need to provide coherent support by the United Nations system at the regional level to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and other international goals, the Secretary-General points to the need for further measures to strengthen coordination of activities of the United Nations system at the regional level. The regional coordination meetings, mandated by Economic and Social Council, would enhance such measures. His recent reports also refer to the necessity of effective cooperation between the regional commissions, global departments and the United Nations funds and programmes, especially United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and between the commissions and partner regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations. The present report explores these issues further.

II. Report of the Executive Secretaries

2. The meetings of the Executive Secretaries[1] of the regional commissions focused on progress towards the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration; as well as the reform initiatives of the Secretary-General for mainstreaming the regional dimension in the overall work of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors. In the view of the Executive Secretaries, the two issues are interlinked. Progress towards the achievement of the international development agenda requires concerted and coherent support by the United Nations and the United Nations system at the international, regional and country levels.

3. The linkages between development work at the regional and global levels, although increasingly recognized in the mandates provided to the regional commissions by the global conferences, have not been adequately reflected in the dialogue between the Executive Secretaries and Economic and Social Council in the past. The Executive Secretaries, therefore, expressed appreciation of the recent decision by the Council in early 2005, to hold its dialogue with them immediately after the High-level Segment. They view this as a positive step towards the Council's review of the regional dimensions of global issues, including coherent policies to address the varying degrees of achievements of the Millennium Development Goals at the regional and subregional levels.

4. The Executive Secretaries agreed that international development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, are increasingly shaping the development agenda of the regions despite the wide diversity of achievements between the regions and within the regions. The regional commissions have played

an important role in raising awareness about the Millennium Development Goals and the need for different sets of consistent policies which should be developed at the country, regional and international levels. The regional reports prepared in cooperation with United Nations and other regional partners[2] bring out both the trends and heterogeneity within the regions, analyse the underlying causes influencing the subregional divergences, identify good practices and provide policy perspectives and recommendations that can have a bearing for strengthening implementation efforts through regional and international cooperation. The perspectives provided by these reports indicate that achieving the Millennium Development Goals requires addressing issues relating to sharp heterogeneity within the ESCAP, ECA and ECE regions; armed conflict and uneven economic growth in the ESCWA region and the highest income inequality and growth volatility in the ECLAC region (see sects. IV and V.B.1).

5. The regional dimension of the Millennium Development Goals includes regional policies such as regional trade, infrastructure and legal instruments. The regional level offers an opportunity to exchange national experiences on the necessary interrelated policy issues which are of crucial importance for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Regional processes can bridge the gap between global perspectives and country specific concerns. While country-level ownership of the Millennium Development Goals is key, regional approaches can reinforce good practices through exchange of experiences in the forums provided by the regional commissions for all member countries and partner multilateral and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector. Regional monitoring complements national monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals and brings out regional trends and comparative approaches.

6. In this connection, the Executive Secretaries agreed that sustained economic growth and institutional changes as well as targeted employment and social policies are necessary. In particular, regional policies should focus on the interlinkages between growth, equity and poverty reduction; the conditions for a sustained process of poverty reduction; the links between economic policies and sustainable development; the combination of broad-based human capital formation with social protection and specific anti-poverty programmes; adherence to the principles of governance and accountability; and regional integration policies for reducing vulnerability of various external shocks, such as financial crises and natural or man-made disasters. While these key issues are not exhaustive, they are relevant to all countries. However, they must be addressed in different ways, depending on the initial conditions of development and the institutional history of countries, and within their subregional and regional context.

7. The Executive Secretaries also stressed that although national policies are crucial for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, in a globalized world and in a situation of growing interdependencies, a supportive international climate is indispensable. International commitments on aid, debt and trade issues for developing countries are essential to implement for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

8. The Executive Secretaries also exchanged views on the activities undertaken by the commissions concerning regional follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development; the preparations for the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in follow-up to the World Summit on

Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002; and preparations for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunis in 2005. With respect to follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development, the activities of the regional commissions focused on analytical work for promoting policy dialogue, capacity-building, including sharing of best practices. Follow-up actions, as articulated in the Monterrey Consensus, have further strengthened partnerships between the regional commissions, regional development banks, and other financial institutions that were forged in the preparatory process for the Monterrey conference.

9. The regional commissions are promoting an integrated approach in their activities, especially taking into account the financial requirements for the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, the activities of the regional commissions, in areas of trade and trade facilitation, continue to be an important aspect of their follow-up to the financing for development process, many of which involved providing support to their member States for their effective integration into the global trading system. Together with other partners, including UNCTAD, they continue to assist member States at the regional level in formulating trade policies and strategies that will ensure more equitable results of globalization and liberalization. In this connection, the Executive Secretaries noted that the regional commissions will prepare a joint report at the High-level Dialogue of the General Assembly on Financing for Development (27-28 June 2005), which will focus on the obstacles to the achievement of the Monterrey Consensus and on the further measures required for its implementation from a regional perspective.

10. With respect to mainstreaming the regional dimension in the work of the United Nations and enhancing the coherence of its activities in the economic and social sectors, the Executive Secretaries expressed satisfaction with the measure taken so far by the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. In addition to ongoing cooperation, better linkages — particularly between activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNCTAD and the regional commissions — were established in the course of the preparation of the proposed programme budget 2006-2007, under the thematic clusters established for collective review of the programme submissions in relation to each of the clusters. The three entities also jointly produced the global report, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2005*.

11. Although the Secretary-General's report entitled "Review of technical cooperation in the United Nations" (A/58/382) found relatively little overlap among the concerned entities in the provision of technical cooperation, the Deputy Secretary-General requested the Executive Heads of UNDP, Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the regional commissions to work together through Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs and in coordination with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to achieve further coherence among these activities and more effective use of available resources at the regional level. Strengthened collaboration between the regional commissions and funds and programmes on the provision of technical cooperation has also been called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 59/250 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. In the light of the recent trend of decentralization of programmes and activities to the regional level by organizations of the United Nations system, including UNDP, the Executive Secretaries are currently exploring, with the executive heads of

Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP, ways for improving cooperation and building on successful experiences to reinforce synergies across the work of the Organization at the interregional, regional and country levels. In this connection, the Executive Secretaries reviewed the results thus far achieved by the regional coordination meetings established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1998/46, annex III, and agreed that they need to be made more effective. The participation of regional directors in these meetings would facilitate decisions on policy and programme issues (see sect. IV.B.I).

12. As stated in Council resolution 1998/46, annex III, the regional commissions are part of the institutional landscape of their regions. Owing to the mandates given to them by the global conferences, they have further strengthened their partnership with other relevant regional organizations and integration groupings as well as civil society institutions. Cooperation with those partners forms a major plank of the commissions' response to promoting regional cooperation and regional public goods. The Secretary-General has noted in his report entitled "In larger freedom: towards development security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005) that threats to peace and security in a globalized world not only include international war and conflict, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, but also poverty, deadly infectious disease and environmental degradation. The Executive Secretaries fully support his assessment and follow-up action. These threats must be addressed by the international community at the global and regional levels in an integrated and preventative manner. The approach taken by the regional commissions has been based on the view that progressive development is in itself conducive to peace while poverty and inequality tend to generate friction and conflict.

13. The recognition of economic, social and environmental dimensions of security has become a basis for long-term cooperation as well as for new areas of cooperation between the regional commissions and other regional organizations. As experienced with tsunami and earlier with man-made catastrophes such as Bhopal, such disasters can account for a larger number of deaths than deaths from "hard threats". Similarly, massive deaths resulting from poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic are destabilizing and require concerted and coordinated response through regional cooperation. The regional commissions and their partner regional organizations have a strategic role to play in the coordination of development policies and strategies for addressing the "soft threats" to security in the respective regions.

14. The Executive Secretaries further explored interregional and horizontal cooperation between the commissions in given areas. In this connection, the Executive Secretaries agreed to convene in July 2005 in Beirut, at the invitation of the Executive Secretary of ESCWA, to address issues raised in the Secretary-General's report (A/59/2005), including policy issues for greater coherence and harmony between bilateral, regional and global agreements, especially in areas relating to trade and development. Building on the experiences gained through their joint meetings, they were of the view that cooperation among the commissions should continue to be strengthened through knowledge sharing and networking. They took stock of ongoing cooperative efforts in the various areas and expressed satisfaction with the results achieved so far, particularly with the recent meetings on transport, programme planning, gender equality, and information and communication technologies (see sect. V.C).

III. Significant substantive issues before the commissions at their sessions in 2005 or with which the commissions are seized

15. The regional commissions' activities, as well as their recent sessions, have focused on a number of substantive issues relevant to the countries of the respective regions at the core of which are the goals of the international global conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals. Policies for regional integration and global partnership received special attention.

Economic Commission for Europe

16. The sixtieth session of ECE (22-25 February 2005, Geneva) was seized with financing for development issues in Europe. According to the report prepared by ECE for the session, economic policy and systemic issues relating to financing for development are relevant to many of the emerging market economies of South-East Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Two round tables were organized around: (a) the exchange of experiences with domestic policies that have successfully increased financial resources for development in Europe; and (b) the role of regional cooperation in financing for development in the region. With respect to successful domestic policies, ECE noted at the session that liberalizing domestic prices and markets as well as foreign trade is important so as to avoid distortions in the allocation of financial resources. Investment in human capital is equally important to create a basis for economic diversification and to foster evolution towards knowledge-based economies. Foreign direct investment (FDI), it was noted, is a particularly beneficial source of financing. With increasing competition for FDIs, it is important to develop an attractive package to match the needs of investors. Domestic policies are also key for fostering interlinkages between foreign and domestic fronts. Resource-rich economies can use commodity stabilization funds to support economic diversity. It was also noted that recently some post-transition economy countries have emerged as donors of official development assistance (ODA) and that they have targeted their aid towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in countries with economies in transition (South-East Europe and Central Asia) and developing countries.

17. With regard to the role of regional cooperation, at its session ECE was of the view that such initiatives can play an important role in improving the business climate and in making countries attractive for investors. Cooperation at the regional level can take different yet complementary forms such as: free trade agreements; harmonization of legislation and standards; coordination of customs procedures; the development of regional infrastructure; the creation of common financial institutions and markets; and sharing of knowledge and experiences. Regional cooperation is an important strategy to mobilize resources for development. Regional institutions, including regional economic agreements, development banks and subregional groupings can play an important catalytic role in the integration process. Nonetheless, for regional cooperation to be successful, participating countries should credibly and unambiguously commit to it. Moreover, while the contributions of regional initiatives to economic development can be significant, member countries should remain the owners of the development and reform agenda. In fostering regional initiatives, regional and intergovernmental organizations ought to achieve a good division of labour and knowledge sharing.

18. The Commission also considered sustainable development in Europe and examined major policy options for water, sanitation and human settlements, taking into account the outcome of the regional implementation meeting in January 2004 and the challenges identified by the parties to the ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and by the Committee on Human Settlements. The commission stressed that despite progress achieved, there was a need for action-oriented local and national measures as well as regional cooperation to speed up efforts to meet the internationally agreed development goals and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation commitments, particularly in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucuses and Central Asia and some south-east European countries, which include five of the poorest countries in the world. The Commission also reviewed the regional dimension of Millennium Development Goals as well as ECE's activities in support of their achievement.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

19. The theme of ESCAP's sixty-first session (12-18 May 2005, Bangkok) was on implementing the Monterrey Consensus in the Asian and Pacific region: achieving coherence and consistency. In the context of the overall challenges involved in mobilizing adequate financing for the development of the countries of the region, a ministerial round table considered the various issues under the Monterrey Consensus. In line with the emphasis provided by the Monterrey Consensus, achieving coherence and consistency between policies is a central focus of the study. The importance of ODA, particularly for the most disadvantaged countries, for tackling the Millennium Development Goals, including the many dimensions of poverty, was emphasized. In addition to the need to increase the level of ODA substantially, the report draws further attention to the urgent need for greater coherence and consistency between aid and trade policies of developed countries so as to increase the effectiveness of the aid that they provide. Systemic weaknesses, such as those which created the Asian financial crisis, and initiatives taken in the region to correct them, such as the Chiang Mai Initiative, also received special focus. The role of regional integration in promoting the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus including the role of ESCAP in implementing the Consensus was emphasized. The study made two proposals as the way forward in implementing the Consensus in Asia and the Pacific region. First, is the possibility of setting up an Asian Investment Bank to meet the region's infrastructure needs in the light of the slowdown in infrastructure development in the region. ESCAP would prepare a feasibility study, similar to the mandate it was given in 1966 for the establishment of the Asian Development Bank. Second, ESCAP could pursue a two-track strategy for furthering the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. Under the first track, ESCAP would strengthen its technical assistance programme, especially in finance trade and resource mobilization. It would also focus on capacity-building of member countries and provide a forum for policy exchange. The second track would be for ESCAP to bring together various subregional initiatives so as to exploit synergies between these initiatives and to ensure consistency with the global mandates.

20. On the economic and social situation in the region and related policy issues, although the region achieved the highest rate of growth in the world and is becoming an engine of world growth with China and India outpacing the United States and the European Union, there still remain key Millennium Development Goal challenges to be addressed, particularly by the off-track countries which

include the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, countries with economies in transition and island developing countries. The ESCAP region has the largest number of absolute poor (two thirds of the world's poor) and several countries have increasing poverty levels. The sharp increase in youth unemployment (38 million young people — half of the world's jobless youth) and the implications of the tsunami disaster represent new development challenges for the region. The region is also ageng at a faster rate, and in the next 50 years will be home to over 1.2 billion people aged 60 years and older (63 per cent of the world total). Women account for the majority of the older population and most of them are poor. Pensions are mostly unsustainable and demands are rising for health-care services for the elderly. As ESCAP's report indicates, there is a need for pro-poor growth strategies and regional cooperation.

21. The serious socio-economic impact of the recent tsunami disaster on many countries in Asia, especially Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives was considered in depth. In addition to the economic and social losses incurred, the report before the session also reviewed national and regional experiences in disaster management and preparedness and examined emerging issues in regional cooperation in natural disaster reduction. The High-Level Panel organized at the session drew attention to the importance of regional cooperation in disaster reduction, especially in early warning systems and the development of regional strategies to deal with disaster risk management.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

22. In response to the San Juan resolution of its thirtieth session, held in 2004,[3] ECLAC undertook more in-depth analyses of the major issues underlined in the resolution, including countercyclical macroeconomic management, social cohesion and sustainable development issues. The Latin America and the Caribbean region has the worst income distribution in the world, and this has been further exacerbated in some member countries. Since this is a serious obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, ECLAC has been focusing its work on the urgent need to develop distributive policies, including through the provision of stronger social safety nets and a more inclusive production model. The regional review that ECLAC has prepared in cooperation with other organizations of the United Nations system on meeting the Millennium Development Goals, proposes a Latin American and Caribbean vision of development. Its threefold approach focuses on:

(a) Inequality, which is the main obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the region. Economic growth alone would not address the basic needs of the entire population, particularly the most disadvantaged, nor would it ensure achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in every country within a reasonable time frame;

(b) Synergies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The report identified those areas of public policy intervention where their impact in other areas is greatest;

(c) Financing needs for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, it explored the various components of Goal 8, namely, international assistance, indebtedness and international trade and financing from the perspective of middle-income countries.

23. ECLAC has continued to carry out analytical and technical cooperation work regarding factors that promote growth and reduce volatility, i.e., the pronounced volatility of the business cycles of its member countries which has undermined their economies' ability to achieve sustained growth. The procyclical profile of the macroeconomic policies, particularly the fiscal and monetary policies were at the centre of debate at many seminars and meetings organized by ECLAC, such as the 17th Regional Seminar on Fiscal Policy, co-sponsored by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and Inter-American Development Bank, with additional support from the German cooperation agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)) and the Finance Ministry of Chile.[4]

24. ECLAC has also been seized with the new challenges to regional integration and trade. The wave of regionalism experienced by the region during the 1990s, sparked intraregional trade for some time, stimulating in this way gross domestic product (GDP) growth. However, in recent years, bilateral North-South trade agreements have proliferated. While their benefits in terms of access are evident, they also generate administrative costs and include non-trade issues whose benefits are not so clear. ECLAC has been working with member countries to strengthen their institutional capacity to adequately manage free trade agreements.[5]

25. Social cohesion has been another area of focus for ECLAC, particularly the formulation of public policy proposals to address the structural heterogeneity prevailing in the region. The challenge is to develop institutions and public policies in the fields of employment, education and training that can enhance employment opportunities while ensuring adequate social protection. Related activities in this area include the flagship report entitled "Social Panorama of Latin America 2004" and the seminar organized in November 2004 in cooperation with the European Commission and the Government of Mexico entitled "Economic Integration and Social Cohesion: Lessons learned and perspectives". ECLAC and the European Commission will carry out a series of related regional workshops during 2005-2006, and social cohesion will also be the theme for discussion at the Commission's thirty-first session in Uruguay in 2006.

26. Special attention is being given to sustainable development as a way for the region to capitalize on its unique natural resource endowment. Its current work has been focusing on integrating the economic and environmental agendas, particularly in the design of economic instruments appropriate for sustainable development, and the analysis of the sustainability of the productive development of energy and other natural resources.

Economic Commission for Africa

27. The theme of the thirty-eighth session of ECA (11-15 May 2005, Abuja) was "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa". In recent years, African countries have undertaken a very ambitious agenda of reforms aimed at improving the economic, political and social conditions in the region. However, a majority of countries in Africa, and more specifically, sub-Saharan Africa, continue to face serious challenges and are not on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. At the thirty-fifth session in 2002, member States agreed that the poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) would be the main instrument for incorporating continent-wide priorities into national programmes and accelerating progress

towards the Millennium Development Goals. Regional experience with PRSs shows that increased country ownership and participation have had a gradual and positive impact on the formulation of national development plans. However, according to ECA, the PRSs have not been underpinned by comprehensive growth strategies and have not had enough focus on the Millennium Development Goals. The second generation of PRSs will need to address structural constraints to poverty reduction founded on innovative strategies for wealth creation. The recent session of the Commission explored ways of strengthening within the PRSs, growth, employment creation and poverty reduction. It also addressed the importance of investing in the agriculture and infrastructure sectors and mainstreaming trade in the national strategies in order to stimulate economic growth and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

28. Improving Africa's potential to meet the Millennium Development Goals will also require new and energized relations between Africa and its partners based on trust and a shared responsibility for development effectiveness. Africa's development partners would need to meet their commitments to significantly increase aid flows in a predictable and coherent manner. Since operationalizing mutual accountability and monitoring commitments are essential, the recent session of the Commission paid special attention to the first joint Mutual Review Report prepared by ECA and OECD. The report highlighted several key issues, including benchmarks for measuring progress towards mutually agreed commitments; the challenges of improving aid effectiveness; and promoting policy coherence.

29. Since its thirty-seventh session, in 2004, which focused on financing for development in Africa, ECA has undertaken a number of follow-up activities. In the fourth "Big Round Table" it organized in Addis Ababa in October 2004, the role of the State in addressing the major constraints to private investment was considered and several policy measures were proposed relating to the domestic financial sector, infrastructure and regional integration, the role of small and medium enterprises, private-public sector partnerships and the creation of an investment climate facility that is closely aligned to and supported by the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). In its economic report on Africa, 2005, entitled, "Meeting the challenges of unemployment and poverty in Africa", ECA presented policy recommendations for increasing investment that will lead to employment creation, especially in the private sector, and to poverty reduction. The report underscores the need for further and deeper reforms in many areas such as education and training policies and trade; and for creating an enabling business environment that is attractive to domestic and foreign investment.

30. In support of NEPAD's trade objectives, ECA conducted four subregional expert group meetings to enhance negotiation capacity of member States in CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community in Central Africa) (December 2004), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (March 2005), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (March 2005) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (April 2005). For the promotion of intra-African trade, it organized an expert group meeting in March 2005 to discuss constraints on intraregional trade and measures for addressing them.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

31. ESCWA continues to focus on the development of a region that is under crisis conditions. At its twenty-third session (9-12 May 2005, Damascus) it deliberated on the effects of war and instability on regional cooperation and integration and on the development process in the ESCWA region; achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; and on related social policies in the region. The intermittent wars and potential risks have impacted the development process of Western Asia more than any other part of the world. According to ESCWA, had the region not been at war in 1990-1991, it would have been by year 2002 at least $600 billion richer; had the real risk or perception of risk not existed, the ESCWA region poverty rates could have been halved by 2015.

32. Yet the 2004 Economic and Social Survey argues that while these issues are a "major force", they are not a "force majeure" and that a balanced development can be sparked by an adequate mixture of policies. Declining investment rates represent the principal cause behind poor economic performance as they were on average 4 per cent below the investment rates for the developing world. While reviving the region's economy requires first and foremost an end to military and political conflicts, efficient institutions and improved cooperation between Governments, the private sector, investment institutions and donor organizations need to be developed. Moreover, policies should include measures for labour intensive growth, as over the next 10 years the region will require 35 million jobs to reduce unemployment rates. They should also focus on the need for improved income distribution and creation of new assets, adjustment of the education system to labour market needs and on financial reforms.

33. In the area of social policies, ESCWA pursued the second phase of a major project "Towards integrated social development policies in the ESCWA region". The project's long-term goal is to enable member countries to (a) adopt an integrated perspective and coherent policies with respect to education, health, employment, social protection, etc.; and (b) monitor and assess the planning and implementation processes of the various social policies as well as existing coordination among the main stakeholders, including relevant ministries and other national authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and specialized research centres.

34. Over the period 2003-2005, several meetings and workshops were held, mainly to provide guidance and input to the regional report on social policies. Through the process, ESCWA also produced a series of national reports on social policies, which provide necessary information and indicators on the status and impact of social policies on major sectors such as health and education, as well as on poverty reduction, the family and vulnerable groups and social safety nets in the countries of the region. Other studies undertaken focused on social thematic issues, including on the linkage between democracy and development in the Arab region.

35. The Commission was also brought up to date on the mechanisms for integrating the various systems of transport in the region, facilitated by ESCWA in support of regional integration. The Agreement on cooperation in the field of maritime transport in the Arab Mashreq was submitted for adoption at the session. It is third after the Agreement on International Roads in the Arab Mashreq (May 2001) and the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq (April 2003), all of which emanated from the Declaration on the adoption and development of the integrated system in the Arab Mashreq (May 1999).

IV. Interregional cooperation — achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration: a regional perspective

36. Implementation of the outcomes and commitments of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields, including the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development, are inextricably interlinked with the achievement of the commitments set out in the Millennium Declaration. They are also mutually reinforcing. Against that backdrop, the following analysis of regional perspectives on the progress in their implementation and on the obstacles and constraints faced seeks to highlight the crucial links between means and goals, on the one hand, as well as the sustainability of achievements and the nexus between elimination of poverty, employment and social integration, on the other, to which globalization adds a critical dimension.

Picture of a mixed performance

37. The goals set forth in the Millennium Declaration encapsulate a synthesis of the multidimensional aspects of development which affect vast proportions of population, especially in the developing countries. Together with the global United Nations conferences and summits, they also underline the urgency for achieving rapid and sustained economic growth in the developing countries with social equity and sustainable development. Within that framework, the regional assessments and analyses carried out by the regional commissions on the development trends and implementation of goals emanating from the above events, including the Millennium Development Goals, reveal, at best, a mixed picture, mostly of significant shortfalls. They also often offer examples of sharp contrasts in achievements. The underlying message that emerges from the regional and subregional assessments and analyses is that generalization of global and regional trends obscure vast differences across and within regions, subregions and, at times, even within countries.

38. In some parts of the developing world, especially in China and East Asia, there have been real development gains and significant advancements in reducing both the number of absolute poor and the incidence of poverty. Countries of South-East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa are currently on track to meet the poverty goal. Among these countries, including the world's two most populous countries, there is a good chance of achieving the global objective of halving the proportion of people living in absolute poverty by 2015. Nonetheless, this does not imply that the Millennium Development Goal target on hunger could be met overall, as the target reduction in the number of hungry people by that date will likely remain unachieved. Indeed, if one looks beyond the broad generalization, in reality, the poverty goal and most other Millennium Development Goals are off track in most countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Half of the CIS and South-East European countries are expected to miss at least one of the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, the situation demands a significant scaling up of efforts through undertaking concrete initiatives, from the side of both recipients and donor countries, under Millennium Development Goal-driven strategy.

39. Another aspect of the development scenario is that, since the 1990s, most countries, especially in Asia and Latin America and the ECE regions, witnessed an increase in inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. Latin America continues to be the region with the worst income distribution indicators of all. While that shows substantial policy inadequacies in the social areas, it is also partly a reflection of a problem with the "quality" of economic growth. While growth facilitates the reduction of poverty, at the same time not all growth has been equally "pro-poor". Thus, in the countries witnessing a widening disparity, there is a need to bring the issues of income distribution to the core of policymaking.

40. The uneven picture is also evident in other areas. For instance, the achievement of targets relating to universal primary education remains on track in all regions. However, gender equality in primary education has been attained in the ECLAC region, but still is lagging in Africa and Asia, including West Asia. It is also notable that girls represent some 57 per cent of out-of-school children, and that in South and West Asia, they constitute more than 60 per cent. The 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action conclusively showed the uneven progress towards achieving gender equality, even though the normative environment at the national, regional and global levels indicated improvements overall.

Eradication of poverty and hunger

41. Poverty remains the greatest single development challenge in all regions. As a whole, Asia and the Pacific region is expected to meet the income poverty target of $1 a day by 2015, and may even surpass it by a significant margin. However, estimates show that the region continues to have the largest concentration of poor people, almost 700 million of them, accounting for nearly two thirds of the world's poor, with some 81 per cent living in China and India, two of the region's several star performers.

42. In Africa, progress in achieving Millennium Development Goals remains painfully slow. Despite some noteworthy, positive country and subregional achievements, especially in the North African subregion, chances remain remote for the region to achieve the poverty goal without significant intervention and accelerated support. Widespread shortfall of most Millennium Development Goals constrain the development prospects of sub-Saharan Africa, where continuing food insecurity, high child and maternal mortality, expanding slums and rise in extreme poverty remain widespread. Notable in this connection is that the number of people living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa has doubled.

43. Progress in reducing extreme poverty lagged behind in the ECLAC region, resulting in the increase of the absolute number of extremely poor people by 3 million between 1990 and 2004. While six of the countries in the region have already achieved the target or are likely to do so, as many as 96 million people, or 18.6 per cent, of the region's total population still live in extreme poverty. Five countries have already met the target of reducing hunger by 50 per cent. However, 10 of 24 countries analysed saw an increase in undernourishment or could not reduce it enough to be on track to reach the target.

44. Even with reductions in poverty levels in some of its countries, the ESCWA region as a whole will not succeed in halving by 2015 the proportion of people living in absolute poverty. The situation of conflict has had its adverse effect on

some of the countries in the region. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the real GDP fell below its 1986 level.

45. South-East Europe and the CIS countries have a high share of people living in poverty, with the incidence remaining high in seven low-inco: . countries in that region. About half of them are expected to miss at least one of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those relating to poverty, child mortality, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS. The number of people living on less than $1 a day in those countries ranges from 12-22 per cent. Notably, economic development and social protection seem to be more poverty-reducing in the four European Union candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey) than in the remaining South-East European countries.

Sustainability of achievements

46. Of no less significance are the dimensions of sustainability of achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and of ensuring an enabling environment for medium- and long-term development. Even in several countries of Asia, the gains in achieving the poverty target made during the early 1990s have been lost owing to ineffective macroeconomic management, poor governance, and continued exclusion of women, the poor and the marginalized segments of the population in local-level delivery of health, education and sanitation services. Similar deficiencies can be observed in some of the other regions as well. The financial crises and the volatility of capital flow which had particularly affected Asia and Latin America since the 1990s, as well as the series of natural disasters, including the recent tsunami disaster, also interrupted progress and resulted in increasing poverty in the affected countries.

47. Targeted interventions with adequate internal and external support sustained over a sufficient length of time and as part of overall development strategy are essential for some countries and for the most-affected people. Many of the geographically disadvantaged countries suffer from adverse agro-climatic conditions and are susceptible to natural disasters. Pockets of extreme poverty within countries are common in all regions which include geographically inaccessible areas, remote rural communities and urban slums. At times, almost entire groups of people, such as indigenous people and ethnic minorities who suffer from social exclusion, remain entrenched in dire poverty. Women, in particular, remain vulnerable in many countries in all regions. By way of illustration, the situation of women in sub-Saharan Africa is worth noting. There, women comprise as much as 60 per cent of the informal sector and 70 per cent of agricultural labour. In West Asia and in most other regions, women also have less access to education, health and technologies than men.

48. The HIV pandemic, further aggravated by widespread and increasing prevalence of other communicable diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, undermines the economic situation in many countries of Africa and elsewhere, including the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, China and South Asia. Moreover, that prevalence poses medium- and long-term threats to the development of affected countries, as also to the very fabric of their social and economic infrastructures and human resource endorsements. According to the United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS), life expectancy in nine African countries has already dropped to below 40 because of HIV/AIDS.

49. Conflict and war in the Middle East and in extensive areas of Africa have drastically undermined prospects of those countries while also diverting their scarce resources away from development. Because of regional instability and political tension, West Asia, on average, has lost 2 percentage points of growth per year since 1980. Between 1990 and 2000, there were 19 major conflicts in Africa, where per capita growth rate declined by 2.2 per cent during conflicts and by almost as much for several years following the end of hostilities.

Poverty, employment and social integration

50. Employment, which is a key to reducing poverty and strengthening social integration, is characterized by a stubborn persistence of a number of adverse factors in most regions, more particularly in Africa, West Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. After the Middle East, Africa has the second highest ratio of unemployment with an estimated rate of 10.4 per cent unemployed. Even among those employed, 45 per cent do not earn enough to provide for the basic needs of their families. In the ECLAC region, the trend towards higher levels of unemployment, currently at 10 per cent, shows no signs of abating. By end-2003, the number of jobless in Eastern Europe and in the CIS was about 18 million and 10 million, respectively. Notably, in several regions or subregions, including the Middle East and Central Asia, women's employment opportunities declined and often shifted to lower paid jobs with few or no social benefits. In most regions, jobs created over the past decade were characterized by low productivity and lack of social protection. During the 1990s, 7 out of every 10 new jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean have been in the informal sector. In all regions, women predominate in informal economy.

51. The reduction of poverty as well as working poverty are also dependent on productivity growth. An ILO study cites East Asia and South Asia, which witnessed the higher productivity growth rates over the last decade, to underscore that point. As a result, the proportion of people living on under $1 a day and the overall poverty in those subregions have been on the decline. Demographic pressure remains a serious concern for labour markets in Africa, West Asia, and the ECLAC region, as well as in Asia and the Pacific. ESCWA region has the highest ratio in the world of new entrants into the labour force per year, with young people constituting an ever greater percentage of those seeking employment. In many countries in those regions, functional literacy is too low and ill-suited to adjust to the changing patterns of the globalized labour market, which require adjustment to competition. Inappropriate education policies result in both skill mismatch and low skill supply. Extensive segments of population in many countries suffer from exclusion due to illiteracy. In the Arab countries, 27 per cent of men and a staggering 49 per cent of women are illiterate.

52. Given the situation of widespread open and disguised unemployment as well as increasing inequality in income in most regions, creation of employment opportunities should be a primary means of progressing towards more equality in terms of income distribution and the eradication of extreme poverty. As a country's income distribution is related to its productive development pattern, policies are needed to reduce social and productive heterogeneity within countries. The existence of different kinds of firms (informal, and small, medium and large), each with their own strengths and weaknesses, makes it necessary to design differentiated policies and private-public partnerships to address their problems and potential.

53. The enhancement of social equity should be the cornerstone of the public agenda and government action necessary at the national, regional and international levels. This requires significant institutional strengthening to integrate economic and social policies more explicitly and to evaluate the distributive impact of economic policies on the improvement of people's livelihoods. Stability of social spending is crucial, inasmuch as instability and fluctuations reduce the efficiency of social spending. Guaranteeing access of the poor to public services is also significant and targeting should be seen as an instrument, rather than as a substitute, for universality. A new institutional architecture to address social equity and attain social cohesion is urgently called for.

Adjusting to globalization

54. The regional analyses underscore the link and synergies among the Millennium Development Goals, including Goal 8, which would strengthen the capacity of the developing countries to be more effective in coping with globalization. In most of them, especially in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries, the lack of capacity impacts directly on their poverty situation and development prospects. While the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative has delivered tangible benefits to several African and least developed countries, many others in similar situations await some relief. Even for those benefiting from the HIPC Initiative, the economic conditions on which their debt relief was based have considerably worsened, and several countries, including those few that received debt relief, have backtracked into further unsustainable debt. In Africa and elsewhere, there are "semi-HIPC" countries and middle-income countries that are burdened with unsustainable debt-servicing capacities and have resources that are far too inadequate to finance the Millennium Development Goals. ECA data indicates that 80 cents of every dollar that flowed into Africa from foreign sources for economic development flowed back out, suggesting widespread capital flight primarily fuelled by debt. The ECLAC region has suffered from decrease in ODA, capital flows and foreign direct investment levels, and that region's average debt to export ratio (over 1.5) is higher than any other developing region. In addition, sharp trade restrictions, including for intraregional trade, are hindering agricultural and manufacturing exports of developing countries on all continents. The share of intraregional trade in Africa and among the Arab countries is still merely about 10 per cent of their respective trade. The significance of export and trade promoting initiatives and their impact on Millennium Development Goals has been amply demonstrated by the Asian experience.

Key challenges

55. The experiences of China, East Asia and India have been a powerful demonstration that rapid progress can be made in tackling poverty. Moreover, experiences of countries, especially in Latin America and Asia, have shown the absolute need for safeguarding against global economic and financial volatilities, without which hard-earned gains can erode almost overnight. At the same time, high economic growth, while indispensable, is not sufficient for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives set out in the global conferences and summits of the 1990s. Medium- and long-term viability of development also needs to be ensured. That often calls for fundamental reforms in governance and macroeconomic policies at the national level, on the one hand, and the creation of a

supportive enabling environment at the regional and global levels. At the national level, a mix of macroeconomic policies that puts social and human development at the centre, together with an appropriate package of targeted policy initiatives, is required to address the issues of poverty, social integration and social cohesion. Indeed, a fiscal covenant is urgently needed to guarantee accountability, transparency and efficiency in the use of public revenues together with net increases in social programmes that include education, health care, nutrition and sound environmental management. Although the need for increasing social spending, as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), is attracting growing attention of countries in all developing regions, the ECLAC region seems to be leading by example. Between 1990-1991 and 2000-2001, virtually all the countries in that region increased their social spending in both absolute and relative terms. Region-wide, the average percentage of GDP earmarked for social spending in the ECLAC region rose from 10.1 per cent to 13.8 per cent. This trend, which is expected to continue, should involve better targeting of social spending and strengthening of social institutions. Other regions with low-income countries should follow a similar pattern.

56. Investments in infrastructure and human capital are the bedrock for increasing average productivity and for ensuring high growth over a sustained period of time. Investments in physical infrastructure such as transport, water, sanitation, power and communications, unlock growth potentials and overcome geographical handicaps in low-income countries. Poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) should integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. It is also important that the dialogue around country-owned PRSs address these issues, as well as issues of gender equality, employment and workers' rights to help to achieve the necessary growth while ensuring that development will accrue lasting benefits.

57. In a situation of growing interdependence, national policies and actions must be complemented and supported by a favourable international environment. Many developing countries, especially in Africa and the least developed countries, are highly in need of ODA to support their development. Likewise, early and successful conclusion of the Doha Development Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations, with improved access to developed country markets, ambitious trade liberalization for agricultural goods and especially for commodities, as well as WTO-compliant regional trading arrangements, are urgently needed. In essence, there is an imperative need to design national, regional and global policies in a coherent setting for positioning developing countries advantageously for sustained development in an increasingly globalizing world.

Value added of regional approaches

58. With growing global economic interdependence, regional cooperation offers countries an effective vehicle for facing the common development challenges and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is essential to build regional public goods in a wider context of global-regional-national partnerships. South-South cooperation, in particular, enables developing countries to share experiences and make use of their own resources and technology more efficiently for sustainable development. It also helps to shield them from shocks and volatilities in the global economic and financial environment. While country-level ownership of the Millennium Development Goals is key, regional approaches can reinforce good practices at the country level and promote them on a wider scale across the region.

Regional cooperation can energize partnership between countries and regional and multilateral organizations, as well as civil society and the private sector. Indeed, synergies between national, regional and global efforts are essential for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and for the realization of objectives set out in the global conferences and summits of the 1990s.

59. In addition to global agreements on aid, debt and trade issues, regional and subregional trade and investment offer significant opportunities to regional and subregional integration processes and cooperation initiatives. They can also lead to regional transport and ICT infrastructures and networks. Likewise, regional and subregional health and environment policies in a transboundary context play an important role in preventing health diseases and in safeguarding growth with environmental sustainability. The growing demand for natural resources puts a premium on promoting regional cooperation policies. Strengthening of regional and subregional cooperation should accordingly, remain a critical component for realization of the objectives contained in the Millennium Declaration and for effective implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

V. Effective linkages among the regional commissions and between the commissions and other partners

A. Mainstreaming the activities of the regional commissions at the global level

60. The Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions participated actively in all the meetings of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. In addition to exchanges of information and views on the preparation for the September 2005 Summit and flagship publications, the Committee gave particular attention to the preparation of the 2006-2007 programme budget. The regional commissions participated actively in the 11 thematic clusters of the Committee that were established for the planning and coordination of activities included in the proposed programme budget.

61. In paragraph 76 of its resolution 59/250 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development, the General Assembly, inter alia, called upon the organizations of the United Nations development system, its regional commissions and other regional and subregional entities to intensify their cooperation and adopt more collaborative approaches to support country-level development initiatives at the request of recipient countries, in particular through closer collaboration within the resident coordinator system and by improving mechanisms for access to the technical capacities of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels. In the resolution the Assembly further stressed the importance of utilization of the analytical and normative capacities of the regional commissions and such organizations not represented at the country level for the CCA process.

62. The involvement of the regional commissions with the CCA and UNDAF processes, currently varies from region to region, and is generally spotty though growing for most regions. In the light of the growing decentralization by organizations of the United Nations system to the regional level, there is a greater need for improved and systematic coordination with the regional commissions.

Their analytical capacities and the comparative advantage they have operationally in addressing cross-border issues and promoting relevant initiatives, such as shared transport and energy infrastructure, transboundary waters, cross-border and regional trade, and facilitation and harmonization of norms and standards, should be utilized more fully for the CCA and UNDAF processes. Moreover, their well-established relationship with regional and subregional organizations outside the United Nations system, including integration groupings should also prove very useful. As indicated in section I of the report, the Executive Secretaries are exploring with the executive heads of UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs further ways for coordinating the United Nations technical cooperation activities at the interregional, regional and country levels.

63. In consultations with the regional commissions and UNDP, the UNDG result-oriented priorities for 2005 have identified several specific proposals to address the issues raised in the above-mentioned resolution. These include: (a) strategy and training programmes to enable United Nations country teams to effectively address substantive and economic development issues in the UNDAF; and (b) promoting country-level capacity to support increased involvement of non-resident agencies and entities of the United Nations, including the regional commissions in CCA/UNDAF and poverty reduction strategy papers.

B. Partnership at the regional level

1. Partnership within the United Nations system: regional coordination meetings

64. In its resolution 1998/46, annex III, the Economic and Social Council had mandated regional coordination meetings under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary-General or under the aegis of the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions. The purpose of these meetings is to provide a strategic and coherent response by the United Nations system to priority issues to the respective regions within the overall United Nations development agenda. During the period under review, such meetings were held as follows: ECE on 28 January 2005; ESCAP on 25 May and September 2004 as well as on 27 January 2005; ECLAC on 6-7 October 2004; ECA on 9-10 July 2004; and ESCWA on 23 June 2004. Since the inception of these meetings, the regional commissions consulted with partner organizations on their agendas and continued to organize them within existing resources and in a flexible manner.

65. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals received special attention at the recent meetings. The Millennium Declaration has sparked renewed reflection and recognition that with the interlinkages of its goals and targets, the United Nations system, with its multisectoral character, needs to undertake a conscious, collective and coordinated response at the regional level. In this regard, the inter-agency efforts led by ESCAP and ECLAC during the period under review should be highlighted. Factors underlying the differences and commonalities at the regional and subregional levels need to be recognized and regional policies need to be developed accordingly. Regional coordination meetings could serve as forums for exploring further collaboration in technical cooperation projects, conducting joint meetings with development partners, exchanging information on planned regional flagship reports and documents as well as sharing knowledge management experiences and disseminating information. For example, some of the commissions,

such as ECLAC and ESCWA, have designed websites for the purpose of disseminating information on the regional activities of the United Nations system in given areas.

66. With respect to operational activities, the United Nations organizations and agencies are highly diversified, and the challenge for the regional coordination meetings, since their inception, has been how to sustain the effort to bring the different capacities and comparative advantages of the various organizations, who respond to diverse mandates, to respond jointly and effectively to priority areas of the respective regions. There are indeed ongoing joint operational activities at the regional level. However, the results of these regional coordination meetings indicate that effectiveness of the United Nations system's response would certainly increase if policies and activities were better coordinated. For example, ECA undertook an assessment in 2004 of the regional consultations it organizes with sister agencies and in close cooperation with the African Union, the NEPAD secretariat and the Regional Economic Communities in support for NEPAD. It was evident from this assessment that while much progress, although uneven, has been achieved since the establishment of the thematic clusters under the regional consultation meeting, much more needs to be done to build on the collaborative potentials of the United Nations agencies working at the regional level. Beyond serving as a forum for sharing information and identifying issues of common concern, these meetings have not fully realized their objective as an instrument for joint response and strategic coordination. According to the ECA assessment, where real progress has been achieved, it was in areas where a small number of agencies pooled their resources around selected joint projects/programmes that respond to the needs of NEPAD and not to individual programmes of work. The assessment recommended that thematic clusters reconsider their collaborative arrangements, plan together on the basis of comparative advantages and perhaps implement the joint activities separately. The findings of the ECA assessment could easily provide guidance to the coordination meetings organized by the other regional commissions.

2. Partnership with regional organizations

67. Since their inception, the regional commissions have also played a catalytic role in the institution building in their respective regions. The mandates given by the global United Nations conferences and the summits to the regional commissions have also provided additional focus to the initiatives by the commissions to forge and strengthen cooperation with partner organizations not in the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels. Arrangements for cooperation between them and their partners have often been institutionalized. For example, ECE plays a leading role in the review of implementation of OSCE commitments in the economic and environmental dimension, as set forth in the memorandum of understanding signed between the two organizations in December 2004. Clearly, regional cooperation is increasing through regional networks and partnerships involving a growing number of diverse regional organizations. The regional commissions, owing to their region-wide membership and forums as well as multisectoral areas of concern, would need to further coordinate with their partner organizations to build synergies for achieving a coherent regional development agenda that is compatible with the international development agenda and the achievement of the goals of the Millennium Declaration for development, security and human rights. The regional development agenda would be based on the

recognition that development concerns such as chronic hunger and poverty, disease, mass unemployment and marginalization should be addressed in order not to endanger peace and security at the regional and international levels. ESCAP organizes annual consultative meetings between the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and heads of subregional organizations in the region, which since the mid-1990s have served as a platform for exchange of experiences as well as for promotion of intraregional cooperation. This is an effective arrangement that could be replicated by the other regional commissions.

C. Cooperation among the regional commissions

68. The Economic and Social Council in resolution 1998/46, annex III, inter alia, encouraged greater interregional cooperation through the involvement of the regional commissions, both collectively and in partnership. In addition to their ongoing cooperation in specific areas, such as gender equality, transport, ICT, trade facilitation, statistics, water management in the Mediterranean and programme planning (see E/2003/15 and E/2004/15), the regional commissions have been increasingly utilizing the resources available under the United Nations Development Account to implement specific joint projects, which focus on capacity-building of developing countries and economies in transition in such areas as trade, sustainable development and South/South cooperation in support of the achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Africa.

Ten-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

69. The Commission on the Status of Women had requested the regional commissions to play a significant role in the Beijing+10 review process to enable incorporation of the regional perspectives in that process. In this context, cooperation among the commissions continued to be strengthened, inter alia, through their participation in the Task Force on Tools and Indicators coordinated by ECLAC as part of the activities of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Women and Gender Equality. Collaboration among the commissions as Task Force members has strengthened links between producers of statistics and users of statistics at the global, regional and country level, including Governments, United Nations statistical offices, relevant non-governmental organizations and others. In addition, a proposed Development Account joint project on interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goal process aims to develop region-specific targets and indicators and to provide technical assistance to develop or strengthen regional institutions as Millennium Development Goals knowledge hubs. The computer databases that will be developed in each of the regional institutions will be electronically linked with the five commissions as well as with other participating institutions.

World Summit on the Information Society

70. The regional commissions have been participating actively in the World Summit on the Information Society process beginning with the Geneva Summit (December 2003), and leading up to the Tunis Summit, to be held from 16-18 November 2005. They have exchanged information and views on best practices and the outcome of the regional preparatory meetings and related activities. Jointly, they will organize, in conjunction with the Tunis Summit, two High-Level Round Tables and update a brochure entitled "Information Society —

Regional Dimensions". They are also planning to undertake a joint interregional Development Account project on knowledge networks for disadvantaged communities through ICT access points. The project will build a network of knowledge stations serving disadvantaged communities and contributing to bridging the digital divide. Together with Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the commissions are currently implementing a Development Account project on capacity-building in ICT policies. It aims at promoting more informed, broad-based and effective participation of policymakers, private sector and civil society actors from developing countries and countries with economies in transition in support of the regional and international ICT agendas.

ECE/ESCAP strategy for Central Asia and the future orientation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

71. Jointly ECE and ESCAP have developed a new strategic approach to Central Asia and for revitalization of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia for the benefit of countries in the subregion that enjoy membership in both regional commissions. This strategic approach is timely in view of the ongoing stabilization process in that subregion, which is opening up new opportunities for the Central Asian States in such areas as transport, trade, energy and water management, and paving the way for new prospects for cooperation with other potential partners, such as Afghanistan. Among the main objectives of that approach are: (a) supporting the policies of Governments for promoting economic reform, stabilization and an enabling environment; (b) securing political commitments to implement existing agreements; (c) aligning United Nations technical assistance programmes which are currently oriented to specific sectors or individual countries with the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia focus on subregional and regional cooperation, which builds cross-sectoral and multidimensional approaches; (d) strengthening the ECE and ESCAP technical assistance within the framework of implementing the goals and objectives of the global United Nations conferences and summits a well as the Millennium Declaration; (e) improving coordination with partner organizations and institutions within and outside the United Nations family; and (f) providing the donor community with a clear and comprehensive vision of the long-term strategic objectives of technical assistance programmes and projects of the two United Nations regional commissions in the subregion in order to strengthen donor support for ongoing and planned activities.

72. The new strategic approach, which has been elaborated into a joint ECE/ESCAP work plan for the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia for the period of 2005-2007, will be considered by the International Conference on Strengthening Subregional Economic Cooperation in Central Asia and the Future Role of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (Astana, Kazakhstan, 25-27 May 2005), and will be submitted for subsequent approval at the meeting of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Regional Advisory Committee (Astana, 27 May). While individual projects and activities included in the work plan may be administered separately and funded from different sources, their implementation will be carried out with a view to achieving the maximum degree of synergy and complementarity, while also advancing implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked and Transit Countries.

73. The two regional commissions have also proposed two specific projects under the fifth tranche of the Development Account aimed at: (a) strengthening the

statistical capacity in Central Asia to support indicators for the monitoring of progress towards the Millennium Development Goals; and (b) capacity-building for integrated trade information management and trade facilitation in Central Asia.

Programme planning

74. The second meeting of the Chiefs of Programme Planning, hosted by ECLAC in Santiago, Chile, from 22-24 September 2004, included the participation of the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, provided greater clarity to the roles and responsibilities of the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, within the context of a preparation of a results-based programme budget for the 2006-2007 biennium. Among the important decisions taken were: an agreement on a results-oriented format for the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation section under the proposed programme budget for the period 2006-2007; the regional commissions to seek actively increased coordination of regional advisory services with the CCA and UNDAF processes at the country level in their respective regions; and the regional commissions to explore new areas for interregional cooperation.

75. The Executive Secretaries at their meeting in February 2005 agreed to formalize the meeting of the Programme Chiefs as a subsidiary structure to their own joint meetings and to report to them through the Regional Commissions New York Office.

Notes

[1] The Executive Secretaries of the five regional commissions held four meetings during the period under review: in Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Chile, on 18 June 2004; in New York on 14 and 17 July 2004; in New York from 20-22 October; and again on 11 and 17 February 2005. These meetings were held in connection with their participation in UNCTAD XI in São Paolo, the Economic and Social Council substantive session of 2004, dialogue with the Second Committee of the General Assembly on progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals at the fifty-ninth session of the Assembly, the forty-third session of the Commission for Social Development on the 10-year review of the Copenhagen Summit Senior Management Group and meetings of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs.

[2] ECLAC released the *Meeting the Millennium Poverty Reduction Targets in Latin America and the Caribbean* report in December 2002 and is currently leading an inter-agency initiative for a Millennium Development Goal review to be issued in May 2005. ESCAP issued its first regional Millennium Development Goal report entitled *Promoting the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific* in May 2003 and will be issuing the second regional report, prepared in cooperation with UNDP and African Development Bank, in August 2005. The regional Millennium Development Goal reports of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) are scheduled to be released by mid-2005.

[3] ECLAC and ESCWA hold biennial sessions. ESCWA holds its sessions on odd years, while ECLAC holds its sessions on even years.

[4] Related conclusions and proposals of ECLAC analysis were reflected in its flagship publications *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean* (August 2004) and *Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean* (December 2004).

[5] See related analysis in ECLAC's flagship reports on foreign investment in Latin America and the Caribbean (March 2005) and on Latin America and the Caribbean in the world economy (to be published in late 2005).